Tea and Meditation

Tea: A Spiritual Experience
All the Buddhist masters have been drinking tea, it has been their discovery. It was Bodhidharma who discovered tea. The name ‘tea’ comes from the mountain Tha in China, where Bodhidharma was meditating. And the name has remained the same in different languages... just slight changes. In Hindi it is cha, in Marathi it is cha, in Chinese it is tha, in English it has become tea. But a thousand masters have never denied tea as something unspiritual.

On the contrary, Zen has in its monasteries a special teahouse, and when they go for tea it is called a tea ceremony. They have transformed the simple act of drinking tea into a beautiful meditation. You have to leave your shoes outside as if you are entering into a temple. And there is a master who is going to lead the ceremony. Then everybody sits down in the silence of the monastery, the tea is prepared on the samovar and everybody listens to the music of the samovar boiling the tea. It becomes a meditation. Watchfulness is meditation, what you watch does not matter.

Then the master with great grace brings the tea to everybody; pours the tea with immense awareness, consciousness, carefulness, respectfulness, and everybody receives the tea as if something divine is being received. In that silence sipping the tea... and this very ordinary thing has become a spiritual experience. Nobody can speak in the teahouse, silence is the rule. When you put down your cups and saucers you also bow down with gratitude to existence. The tea was only a symbol.

- Osho, Dogen: The Zen Master: A Search & A Fulfilment # 4

Tea Awareness
A cup of tea in Zen is not the same as it is anywhere else in the world. A cup of tea is the greatest reception a Zen master can give to you. The cup of tea represents awareness. After drinking tea you cannot go to sleep; hence tea became one of the most important symbols of awareness, of meditation. “Have a cup of tea” does not simply mean, “Have a cup of tea.” Certainly the tea is offered, but with the understanding that the cup is full of awareness. A cup of tea has been used in many ways by the Zen masters.

- Osho, Joshu: The Lion’s Roar, # 6

From Mundane to Meditative
To make tea a meditative ceremony is just symbolic. It shows that any mundane activity can become meditative. Digging a hole in the garden, planting new roses in the garden... you can do it with such tremendous love and compassion, you can do it with the hands of the buddha. There is no contradiction. The tea ceremony is only the beginning. I say unto you: Your every act should be a ceremony. If you can bring your consciousness, your awareness, your intelligence to the act, if you can be spontaneous, then there is no need for any other religion, life itself will be the religion.

- Osho, Hyakujo: The Everest Of Zen, With Basho’s Haikus, # 5

- Osho, Dogen: The Zen Master: A Search & A Fulfilment # 4
The whole art of meditation is to bring eternal peace, silence, joy to you. And the miracle is: it wells up within you. Meditation simply removes all the barriers in the path. It removes all the rocks; and the streams start flowing. And once you have known that it is nothing to do with anything on the outside, you have a great independence, great freedom, you don’t depend on anybody, you can be absolutely joyous in your aloneness. Your aloneness becomes luminous; it is no longer lonely, it is full of joy, it is a dancing aloneness, it is a singing aloneness, it has great beauty and great poetry and great music.

-Osho.